

Examining Ethics in Voice Teaching

Justin John Moniz



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The role of ethics in teaching has long been a topic of discussion among educators across a wide array of disciplines. However, examining voice teaching ethics requires significant and ongoing discourse. In this article, associate editor Justin John Moniz discusses the value of understanding ethics in voice teaching and offers educators a five-part paradigm to support the implementation of ethical practices in the voice studio setting.

INTRODUCTION

THE ROLE OF ETHICS IN TEACHING has long been an important discussion amongst pedagogues, both within the National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS) and institutions of higher education. The NATS Code of Ethics outlines members' ethical duties and obligations to students, colleagues, and the general public, and aims to promote professional cooperation and productive relationships among its members.¹ The organization's Code of Ethics includes three parts: Personal Ethical Standards, Ethical Standards Relating to Students, and Ethical Standards Relating to Colleagues. As ambassadors of both the art form and continuing education, the voice teacher's moral obligation is to consider their ethical practices carefully.

Taken separately, the concepts of ethics and teaching have provided a source of ancient and modern philosophizing as well as being a catalyst for historical and contemporary discussion and debate about their practical realization and overall contribution to the human condition. They share the somewhat ironic quality of being both simple and complex at the same time. On the one hand, knowing right from wrong may be as straightforward as living by the "Golden Rule"; on the other hand, even for those of us who are self-proclaimed non-relativists, ethical gray areas confront our daily existence to challenge our rational intentions and decisions and our emotional instincts and impulse.²

The primary purpose of any code of ethics is to establish clear and concise principles and expectations. Ultimately, the ethical parameters in place should support the core values of both the profession and the practitioner. While there are myriad models to consider, the author presents a streamlined approach to ethics in five parts: Nurturing Intellectual Curiosity, Creating Challenging Environments, Committing to Lifelong Learning, Collaborating with Colleagues, and Integrating with Community. Ethics provides rational criteria for people to decide or behave in some ways rather than others, and it may not be associated with learning and life experiences.³ Nevertheless, honesty, integrity, and respect should serve as steadfast theorems of the profession.⁴

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NURTURING INTELLECTUAL CURIOSITY

Intellectual curiosity is a fundamental aspect of effective learning. It drives students to explore new ideas, ask questions, and seek information. In voice teaching, nurturing intellectual curiosity is crucial for academic development and fostering critical thinking and artistic expression in voice students. There are various strategies that voice teachers can employ to nurture intellectual curiosity in their students. Encouraging questioning and inquiry-based learning is a powerful approach. Voice teachers should create a studio environment where students feel comfortable asking “why” and “how,” which opens the door to exploration and discovery. Additionally, integrating real-world application into the process through role study and preparation can further stimulate intellectual curiosity by demonstrating the practical relevance of theoretical concepts.

Promoting open-ended discussions and opportunities for student-led endeavors can empower learners to pursue their interests and delve deeper into specific concepts or ideas. Voice teachers might consider allowing students to self-select some of the repertoire they work on in the studio. By allowing students to take ownership of their learning, voice teachers can quickly foster a sense of autonomy and self-directed inquiry. In addition, incorporating a diverse range of resources in the studio, such as peer-reviewed articles, the use of voice technology, and visits by guest clinicians, can broaden students’ perspectives.

Nurturing intellectual curiosity in voice teaching is a powerful means of empowering students to become lifelong learners and critical thinkers. By creating an environment that encourages questioning, exploration, and independent thinking, voice teachers can cultivate a passion for learning in their students that extends far beyond the teaching studio. Embracing practical strategies to promote intellectual curiosity can impact students’ academic growth and development.

CREATING CHALLENGING ENVIRONMENTS

A challenging learning environment is essential for promoting mental growth and fostering critical thinking skills in voice students. Creating such an environment involves providing opportunities for students to

grapple with complex concepts, engage in meaningful discussions, and push the boundaries of their knowledge. Challenging environments in teaching play a crucial role in motivating students to reach their full potential. By presenting students with intellectually stimulating tasks and encouraging them to tackle complex problems, voice teachers can instill a sense of resilience and determination. Furthermore, challenging environments prompt students to think critically, analyze information from multiple perspectives, and develop innovative solutions to problems. Building these environments enhances potential for academic achievement and equips students with the skills necessary to excel in an increasingly complex and dynamic industry.

There are several strategies that voice teachers can implement to create challenging environments in their studios. First, providing open-ended and thought-provoking repertoire assignments can inspire students to think creatively and independently. By offering tasks that do not have straightforward solutions, educators encourage students to explore diverse approaches and develop their problem-solving skills. In addition, promoting collaborative learning activities can create a challenging yet supportive environment. Holding a studio class or performance workshop may serve as an excellent catalyst for group discussions and allow students to exchange ideas, challenge each other’s perspectives, and collectively tackle complex problems. Doing so fosters intellectual curiosity and cultivates essential interpersonal skills such as communication and teamwork.

Incorporating real-world applications and experiential learning opportunities into the pedagogic process can challenge students to apply their knowledge in practical contexts. By exposing students to authentic challenges and dilemmas, voice teachers can inspire them to think critically and creatively to address real-life issues. Tackling relevant and timely repertoire will offer voice students the unique opportunity to place the material in the larger context of social relevance.

Creating challenging teaching environments is vital for empowering students to develop critical thinking skills, resilience, and creativity. By embracing practical strategies to foster intellectual stimulation and meaningful engagement, voice teachers can build a learning environment that motivates students to exceed their

expectations. Recognizing the importance of building a challenging environment in the voice studio can profoundly impact students' intellectual growth and artistic maturation.

COMMITTING TO LIFELONG LEARNING

Lifelong learning is vital for educators, and voice teachers must commit to ongoing personal and professional development. In voice teaching, committing to lifelong learning is essential for staying updated with the latest voice research, pedagogical approaches, and technological advances. Committing to lifelong learning allows for the enhancement of instructional strategies and the ability to adapt to diverse student needs. Voice pedagogy is an evolving discipline, and the needs of young artists relative to industry trends are ever-changing. By staying updated with current best practices in teaching and learning, voice teachers can better address the individual needs of their students and create a more impactful learning environment.

Perhaps most importantly, lifelong learning empowers educators to model the value of learning for their students. When voice teachers prioritize their own ongoing learning, they set a positive example for their students, emphasizing the importance of intellectual growth and curiosity. Voice teachers taking a lesson or coaching themselves supports this concept. Such an approach can inspire students to become lifelong learners, fostering a culture of continuous improvement within the voice studio and beyond. A commitment to lifelong learning supports a growth mindset in the voice studio. Educators who engage in ongoing professional development are more likely to embrace challenges, persist in the face of obstacles, and see effort as a pathway to mastery. This mindset can significantly impact student motivation and achievement as students learn from their teachers' approach to learning and problem-solving.

Voice teachers can pursue pathways to lifelong learning through numerous opportunities for professional development, which may include attending workshops, conferences, and seminars on vocal performance and pedagogy topics, pursuing advanced degrees or certifications, participating in online courses, engaging in research, and collaborating with colleagues to share best practices. Creating a personal learning network and

seeking feedback from peers and mentors can contribute to ongoing growth as a voice teacher. For example, the NATS Intern Program and National Mentoring Collaboratives share storied histories of considerable success amongst past program participants. By embracing ongoing personal and professional development, voice teachers can enhance their instructional practices, inspire their students, and foster a culture of continuous improvement. As the field of education continues to evolve, lifelong learning will remain a cornerstone of effective teaching.

COLLABORATING WITH COLLEAGUES

Collaborating with colleagues is a fundamental element of effective teaching practice. Working with fellow voice teachers and voice care professionals can enhance professional growth, improve student outcomes, and create a more supportive and innovative studio culture.

Collaborating with colleagues fosters a sense of community and shared responsibility within the school environment. When colleagues work together, they can share ideas, resources, and best practices, leading to a more cohesive and supportive teaching community. This collaborative approach can create a positive atmosphere where educators feel valued and supported, ultimately benefiting teachers and students.

Furthermore, collaborating with colleagues provides opportunities for professional development and continuous learning. By engaging in collaborative planning, curriculum development, and assessment design, educators can share their expertise and learn from each other's experiences. Ongoing collaboration allows cultivating a rich and diverse knowledge base, leading to improved instructional strategies and student engagement. In addition, collaborating with colleagues enables voice teachers to effectively address diverse student needs and adapt to changing educational landscapes. By working together, educators can leverage their collective insights to develop differentiated instruction and support systems that cater to a wide range of learning styles and abilities. This collaborative approach can lead to a more inclusive teaching studio and better student outcomes.

Collaboration also promotes a culture of innovation and creativity in voice teaching. When voice teachers share ideas and perspectives, they can spark creativity

and problem-solving, developing new and effective teaching methods. This collaborative synergy can drive positive change and improve teaching practices and student learning experiences. To effectively collaborate with colleagues in voice teaching, individuals can engage in various strategies such as conducting peer teaching observations, participating in collaborative professional development activities, and forming professional learning communities.

INTEGRATING WITH COMMUNITY

Integrating with the community in which one lives and works is arguably one of the most rewarding parts of effective teaching practice. Establishing strong connections with the community can lead to enriched learning experiences, increased student engagement, and a more holistic approach to education. Building community connections allows educators to provide real-world relevance to classroom learning. By forging partnerships with local organizations, businesses, and community members, voice teachers can incorporate authentic and meaningful learning experiences into their work. This approach helps students understand the practical applications of their learning and cultivates a more profound sense of connection with the world beyond the classroom.

Integrating with the community provides opportunities for students to engage in service learning and civic engagement. By collaborating with community partners, teacher can design learning experiences that allow students to address genuine community needs and make a positive impact. This approach enhances students' sense of civic responsibility and fosters empathy, social awareness, and a deeper understanding of the societal issues affecting their community. A studio recital raising awareness for a worthy cause is generally a simple, low-resource endeavor that benefits all parties involved.

In addition, integrating with the community enriches the learning environment by bringing diverse perspectives and expertise. Community members, including local professional artists, and experts, can serve as guest speakers, mentors, and resources for students, offering unique insights and real-world experiences that complement studio instruction. This collaborative exchange of knowledge can inspire students and give them a broader

understanding of various disciplines and career pathways. Moreover, integrating with the community supports the development of strong partnerships between the institution and the greater community. By engaging with local stakeholders, educators can build mutual trust and understanding, leading to increased support for educational initiatives, improved school-to-career transitions, and a sense of collective responsibility for student success.

SUMMARY

In simplest terms, ethics are the moral principles that govern a person's behavior or the conducting of an activity.⁵ One of the most significant challenges within the voice teaching profession is that, since there is no licensure other requirement that one must meet, there is no standard of excellence that must be adhered to by someone who decides to teach voice.⁶ As such, a personal desire to fulfill a commitment to both the student and the profession may serve as an appropriate foundational framework.

Every individual encounters ethical decision-making in their lives. Practitioners often need formal training in moral philosophy in specific professions, such as teaching and medicine, to navigate ethical dilemmas.⁷ The field of ethics in teaching is of great significance and captures the attention of academics and professionals due to its vital role in education.⁸ It delves into the intricacies of human relationships, addresses students' vulnerability, and celebrates the commitment and integrity of voice teachers.

NOTES

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8. Campbell, 378.

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